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Questions relating to information

Report of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Rapporteur: Mr. Gualberto **Rodríguez San Martín** (Bolivia)

I. Introduction

1. At its 3rd plenary meeting, on 17 September 1999, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include in the agenda of its fifty-fourth session the item entitled "Questions relating to information" and to allocate it to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee).

2. The Fourth Committee considered the item at its 22nd to 24th meetings, from 16 to 18 November 1999 (see A/C.4/54/SR.22-24).

3. For its consideration of the item, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Committee on Information on its twenty-first session;[1]

(b) Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/415).

4. At the 22nd meeting, on 16 November, the representative of Indonesia, the Rapporteur of the Committee on Information, introduced the report of the Committee and the proposals contained therein.[2]

5. At the same meeting, the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information made an introductory statement (see A/C.4/54/SR.22).

6. At the 24th meeting, on 18 November, the Under-Secretary-General made a further statement (see A/C.4/54/SR.24).

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21* and addendum (A/54/21 and Add.1).

[2] Ibid., *Supplement No. 21* (A/54/21), para. 49; and ibid., addendum (A/54/21/Add.1), paras. 4 and 7.

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7. At the same meeting, the Secretary of the Committee made a statement (see A/C.4/54/SR.24).

II. Consideration of proposals contained in the report of the Committee on Information

A. Draft resolutions

8. At its 24th meeting, on 18 November, the Committee adopted, without a vote, draft resolution A contained in paragraph 49 of the report of the Committee on Information and draft resolution B contained in paragraph 4 of the addendum to that report (see para. 11).

9. Before the adoption of the draft resolutions, the representative of the United States of America made a statement in explanation of position (see A/C.4/54/SR.24).

B. Draft decision

10. At its 24th meeting, on 18 November, the Committee adopted, without a vote, the draft decision contained in paragraph 7 of the addendum to the report of the Committee on Information (see para. 12).

III. Recommendations of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

11. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolutions:

Questions relating to information

Draft resolution A
Information in the service of humanity

The General Assembly,

Taking note of the comprehensive and important report of the Committee on Information,[3]

Also taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information,[4]

Urges all countries, organizations of the United Nations system as a whole and all others concerned, reaffirming their commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as to those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media, deeply concerned by the disparities existing between developed and developing countries and the consequences

[3] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21* and addendum (A/54/21 and Add.1).

[4] A/54/415.

of every kind arising from those disparities that affect the capability of the public, private or other media and individuals in developing countries to disseminate information and communicate their views and their cultural and ethical values through endogenous cultural production, as well as to ensure the diversity of sources and their free access to information, and recognizing the call in this context for what in the United Nations and at various international forums has been termed "a new world information and communication order, seen as an evolving and continuous process":

(a) To cooperate and interact with a view to reducing existing disparities in information flows at all levels by increasing assistance for the development of communication infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries, with due regard for their needs and the priorities attached to such areas by those countries, and in order to enable them and the public, private or other media in developing countries to develop their own information and communication policies freely and independently and increase the participation of media and individuals in the communication process, and to ensure a free flow of information at all levels;

(b) To ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their professional tasks and condemn resolutely all attacks against them;

(c) To provide support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from public, private and other media in developing countries;

(d) To enhance regional efforts and cooperation among developing countries, as well as cooperation between developed and developing countries, to strengthen communication capacities and to improve the media infrastructure and communication technology in the developing countries, especially in the areas of training and dissemination of information;

(e) To aim at, in addition to bilateral cooperation, providing all possible support and assistance to the developing countries and their media, public, private or other, with due regard to their interests and needs in the field of information and to action already adopted within the United Nations system, including:

(i) The development of the human and technical resources that are indispensable for the improvement of information and communication systems in developing countries and support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes, such as those already operating under both public and private auspices throughout the developing world;

(ii) The creation of conditions that will enable developing countries and their media, public, private or other, to have, by using their national and regional resources, the communication technology suited to their national needs, as well as the necessary programme material, especially for radio and television broadcasting;

(iii) Assistance in establishing and promoting telecommunication links at the subregional, regional and interregional levels, especially among developing countries;

(iv) The facilitation, as appropriate, of access by the developing countries to advanced communication technology available on the open market;

(f) To provide full support for the International Programme for the Development of Communication[5] of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which should support both public and private media.

Draft resolution B
United Nations public information policies and activities

The General Assembly,

Reiterating its decision to consolidate the role of the Committee on Information as its main subsidiary body mandated to make recommendations to it relating to the work of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat,

Concurring with the view of the Secretary-General that public information and communications should be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the United Nations, and that a culture of communications should permeate all levels of the Organization, as a means of fully informing the peoples of the world of the aims and activities of the United Nations,

1. *Reaffirms* its resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946, in which it established the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat;

2. *Welcomes* Angola, the Republic of Moldova and Solomon Islands to membership in the Committee on Information;

3. *Calls upon* the Secretary-General, in respect of the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, to continue to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 2 of its resolution 48/44 B of 10 December 1993 and other mandates as established by the General Assembly;

4. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications,[6] and encourages him to continue the reorientation exercise in the area of public information and communications, while stressing the need to take into account the views of Member States, and requests him to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session;

5. *Emphasizes* that, through its reorientation, the Department of Public Information should maintain and improve its activities in the areas of special interest to developing countries and, where appropriate, other countries with special needs, including countries in transition, and that such reorientation should contribute to bridging the existing gap between the developing and the developed countries in the crucial field of public information and communications;

6. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on programme 23, Public information, of the proposed medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005[7] and, emphasizing that the implementation of the broad objectives outlined in the proposal should be in accordance with the objectives set forth in relevant General Assembly resolutions regarding questions relating to information, requests the Secretary-General to proceed with the submission of the proposal to the Committee for Programme and Coordination for

[5] See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Records of the General Conference, Twenty-first Session, Belgrade, 23 September to 28 October 1980*, vol. 1, *Resolutions*, sect. III.4, resolution 4/21.

[6] A/AC.198/1999/2.

[7] A/AC.198/1999/8.

consideration, in accordance with section I of General Assembly resolution 53/207 of 18 December 1998;

7. *Requests* the Secretary-General also to focus in particular on educational institutions as key and indispensable partners of the United Nations in its efforts fully to inform the peoples of the world of its aims and activities;

8. *Takes note with appreciation* of the efforts of the Secretary-General to strengthen the public information capacity of the Department of Public Information for the formation and day-to-day functioning of the information components of peacekeeping and other field operations of the United Nations, and requests the Secretariat to continue to ensure the involvement of the Department from the planning stage of such future operations through interdepartmental consultations and coordination with other substantive departments of the Secretariat;

9. *Encourages* the Secretary-General further to strengthen consultative arrangements between the Department of Public Information and other substantive departments in the Secretariat, in particular those dealing with development issues;

10. *Recalls* its resolution 53/22 of 4 November 1998 concerning the proclamation of 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, and encourages the Secretary-General to strengthen the public information capacity of the Department of Public Information with a view to disseminating information on and drawing international attention to the dialogue among civilizations and the impact it could have on promoting mutual understanding, tolerance, peaceful coexistence and international cooperation;

11. *Also recalls* its resolution 53/202 of 17 December 1998 concerning the designation of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly as the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations and the convening, as an integral part of the Millennium Assembly, of the Millennium Summit of the United Nations, and encourages the Secretary-General to formulate and implement an effective public information strategy in this regard so as to ensure that the Summit will enjoy broad international support;

12. *Emphasizes* that all publications of the Department of Public Information should fulfil an identifiable need, should not duplicate other publications of the United Nations system and should be produced in a cost-effective manner;

13. *Takes note with appreciation* of the efforts of the Secretary-General to move the Dag Hammarskjöld Library in the direction of a virtual library, and requests him, at the same time, to enrich the stock of books and journals in the Library, including publications on peace and security and development-related issues, in order to ensure that it continues to be a broadly accessible resource for information about the United Nations and its activities;

14. *Urges* the Secretary-General to exert all efforts to ensure that publications and other information services of the Secretariat, including the United Nations Web site, contain comprehensive, objective and equitable information about the issues before the Organization and that they maintain editorial independence, impartiality, accuracy and full consistency with resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly;

15. *Notes* that the request made to the Secretary-General, in its resolution 53/59 B of 3 December 1998, to ensure full and direct access for the representatives of Member States to the briefings organized at Headquarters by the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General and to ensure wider outreach of the outcome of such briefings has not been implemented, and therefore reiterates that request;

16. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that information presented to the media is made available to delegations fully and in a timely fashion;

17. *Reaffirms* the importance attached by Member States to the role of United Nations information centres in effectively and comprehensively disseminating information in all parts of the world, in particular in developing countries and countries in transition, and especially in those countries where there is need for a better understanding of United Nations activities;

18. *Also reaffirms* the importance of all United Nations information centres meeting the primary objectives outlined by the Committee on Information in its report on its ninth session;[8]

19. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme,[9] in which he notes that the objectives of the integration exercise remain valid, and notes his intention to make a concerted effort to address the problems encountered in the implementation of the integration exercise in a number of information centres;

20. *Notes with concern* that, while the co-location of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme has, to some extent, been able to enhance the image of the United Nations, the integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the Programme has, in general, resulted in a lower level of programme delivery and a narrower range of activities and, in cases of relocation of information centres to common premises with the Programme, has frequently resulted in higher maintenance costs and leadership and staff problems, and that, to a large extent, the policy of integration has not in all cases achieved its stated objective of performing functions efficiently, effectively and in a cost-effective manner;

21. *Requests* the Secretary-General to carry out a case-by-case review of, and submit his proposals on the functioning of, the integrated centres on a priority basis, in full consultation with the host Governments, and to submit a report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session;

22. *Notes* that the Department of Public Information intends to prepare, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, a set of guidelines indicating the operational framework for the integrated centres, and requests the Secretary-General to report on the guidelines, prior to their implementation, to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session;

23. *Reaffirms* the role of the General Assembly in relation to the opening of new United Nations information centres, and invites the Secretary-General to make such recommendations as he may consider necessary regarding the establishment and location of such centres;

24. *Takes note* of the information provided by the Secretary-General in his report concerning the allocation of resources to United Nations information centres in 1998,[10] and calls upon him to continue to study ways and means of rationalizing and effecting the equitable disbursement of available resources to all United Nations information centres and to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session;

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[8] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/41/21), sect. III.D, recommendation 36.

[9] A/AC.198/1999/3.

[10] A/AC.198/1999/4.

25. *Welcomes* the action taken by some Member States with regard to providing financial and material support to United Nations information centres in their respective capitals, and invites the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to consult Member States, where appropriate, on the possibility of providing the centres with additional voluntary support on a national basis, bearing in mind that such support should not be a substitute for the full allocation of financial requirements for the United Nations information centres in the context of the programme budget of the United Nations;

26. *Welcomes* the requests by Croatia, Gabon, Guinea, Haiti, Jamaica and Kyrgyzstan for information centres or information components;

27. *Recognizes* the continuing enhanced cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the University for Peace in Costa Rica as a focal point for promoting United Nations activities and disseminating United Nations information materials, and requests the Secretary-General to report on those activities;

28. *Expresses its full support* for wide, accurate, equal and prompt coverage of United Nations activities through the continuation and improvement of United Nations press releases, stresses the importance of having these press releases issued in all official languages of the United Nations, and requests other relevant bodies of the General Assembly to give due consideration to this matter;

29. *Stresses* that radio is one of the most cost-effective and far-reaching media available to the Department of Public Information and an important instrument in United Nations activities, such as development and peacekeeping, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/44 B;

30. *Encourages* further increasing the number of programmes of United Nations Radio, in all available languages, on the United Nations site on the Internet;

31. *Requests* the Secretary-General to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 38/82 B of 15 December 1983 with regard to the introduction of full programming in French and Creole in the work programme of the Caribbean Unit of United Nations Radio;

32. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the design and scope of a pilot project for the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations,[11] and requests the Department of Public Information to start, as soon as possible, the implementation of the pilot project through, *inter alia*, contacts with interested Member States and other specialized institutions, with a view to ensuring the assistance necessary for the success of the project, taking into account the need to enhance the existing resources and services, and further requests the Secretary-General to submit a progress report on the implementation of this project to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session;

33. *Underlines* the continuing importance of using traditional and mass media channels to disseminate information on the United Nations, and encourages the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to continue to take full advantage of recent developments in information technologies, including the Internet, in order to improve, in a cost-effective manner, the dissemination of information on the United Nations, in accordance with the priorities established by the General Assembly and taking into account the linguistic diversity of the Organization;

[11] A/AC.198/1999/50.

34. *Takes note* of efforts by some United Nations information centres to establish their own Web pages in local languages, and recommends that the Department of Public Information encourage other information centres to develop Web pages in the respective local languages of their host countries;

35. *Takes note with appreciation*, with reference to the report of the Secretary-General on the continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites[12] and the report of the Secretary-General on the multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites,[13] of the efforts of the Secretary-General to develop and enhance the United Nations Web sites in all official languages of the Organization, requests him to pursue these efforts and to continue to develop proposals for consideration by the Committee at its twenty-second session, having in mind the goal of achieving modular parity among official languages, stressing that this goal should be achieved in a cost-effective manner and with a focus on textual content;

36. *Welcomes* the establishment of the Geneva Diplomatic Community Network, which has improved the dissemination of information among the permanent missions, the United Nations Office at Geneva and the other international organizations based in Geneva, and requests the Secretary-General to continue providing his support to this important programme;

37. *Expresses its appreciation* for the ongoing programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and countries in transition conducted by the Department of Public Information, and calls for its further expansion so as to include a larger number of trainees from developing countries;

38. *Acknowledges* the important work carried out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and its collaboration with news agencies and broadcasting organizations in developing countries in disseminating information on priority issues;

39. *Requests* the Department of Public Information to continue to ensure the greatest possible access for United Nations guided tours, and to ensure that displays in public areas are kept as informative, up-to-date, relevant and technologically innovative as possible;

40. *Recalls* its resolutions concerning the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, in particular resolutions 51/138 B of 13 December 1996 and 52/172 of 16 December 1997, and encourages the Department of Public Information, in cooperation with the countries concerned and with the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, to continue to take appropriate measures to enhance world public awareness of the consequences of that disaster;

41. *Recalls also* its resolution 53/1 H of 16 November 1998, concerning international cooperation and coordination for the human and ecological rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan, which has been affected by nuclear tests, and encourages the Department of Public Information, in cooperation with relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, to take appropriate measures to enhance world public awareness of the problems and needs of the Semipalatinsk region;

42. *Recalls* its resolution 53/59 of 3 December 1998 and urges the Department of Public Information to take the necessary measures, through the provision of relevant and objective information, with a view to achieving the major objectives set forth in the report

[12] A/AC.198/1999/6.

[13] A/AC.198/1999/9 and Corr.1 and 2.

of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa;[14]

43. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session and to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session on the activities of the Department of Public Information and on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the present resolution;

44. *Requests* the Committee on Information to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session;

45. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-fifth session the item entitled "Questions relating to information".

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12. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) also recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft decision:

Increase in the membership of the Committee on Information

The General Assembly decides to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 93 to 95 members and to appoint Liberia and Mozambique as members of the Committee.

[14] A/52/871-S/1998/318.